



Bill Gradle,  
NRCS State Conservationist



CONGRESSMAN THOMAS E. EWING

# Conservation Update

in Illinois Congressional District

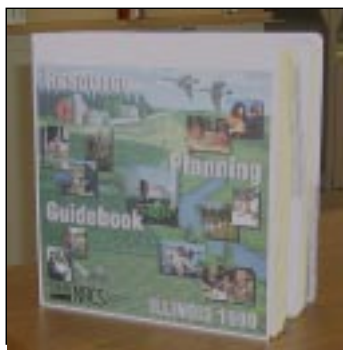
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Spring 2000

## Resource Planning Guidebook

NRCS has created an invaluable tool to help local constituents better address local community and watershed issues. It's called the "Resource Planning Guidebook," or RPG for short. In it are a series of factsheets and information guides to help local resource planning steering committees successfully complete resource planning.



Many communities and residents in East Central Illinois are already involved in or beginning resource planning efforts needed to address issues such as flooding, water quality, open space needs, and others. With the tools in the "RPG," these committees will be successful.

Some of the issues covered in the Guidebook include:

- Working with the Media
- Building Local Ownership of Resource Plans
- Listening Skills
- Conflict Management
- Defining the Planning Area
- Identifying Stakeholders for the Planning Committee

NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle is pleased with the Guidebook contents. "This is the 'toolkit' locally led groups will use to address the issues their communities are facing. We've pulled together a volume of tips, guides, and processes that will ensure successful plans and projects across the state," comments Gradle. The Guidebook has received such praise from other conservationists across the nation that NRCS is considering national distribution.

## New NRCS Leadership in Northeast Illinois

NRCS recently hired a new Assistant State Conservationist to provide leadership for conservation programs in Illinois' northeastern counties. Theresa Chadwick joins the NRCS Leadership Team from NRCS State Office in North Carolina where she was the State Resource Conservationist for a number of years. Chadwick is no stranger to Illinois, having spent six years as an effective District Conservationist in both Eureka and Springfield, Illinois. We welcome Theresa back to Illinois and look forward to the expertise her background will offer. Look for Ms. Chadwick, as she plans to make visits and provide assistance to her new legislative contacts in the region.



## "T" By 2000

For the past decade, the goal of the Illinois Conservation Partnership has been to bring soil loss levels in Illinois down to, or beneath, tolerable levels, or "T" by the year 2000. Well, the year 2000 is here, so where are our soil loss levels? "I can't say that all soil loss on cropland is down to 'T,'" says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "The data we've seen, and the data we've collected with the help of IDOA tells us we came close, but we still have work to do."

Across the state, erosion levels are at "T" on about 86% of cropland. "T" means erosion is occurring at a rate that ensures the soil's long-term productivity. Keep in mind that "T" soil loss data only considers sheet and rill erosion--it does NOT include other very common and problematic types of erosion, such as classic "gully" erosion or streambank erosion. Increased application of conservation practices, made possible through additional program funds and support, will give producers incentives and financial means to put more conservation on the ground and reach the 100% goal. The Clinton Administration's new "Conservation Security Program" concept may make the "T" by 2000 goal a reality by increasing conservation program funding in FY 2001.

## SWCD Legislation Impacts Your Urban Constituents

The Illinois Senate and House of Representatives passed House Bill 2112 which amends the Soil and Water Conservation District Act to provide that all areas within each county are to be considered within the boundaries of their local SWCD.

The purpose of this legislation is to allow SWCDs to serve ALL residents within the entire county. The services SWCDs can make available to residents may include issues such as subdivision development ordinances, construction site erosion control ordinances, etc. With towns, villages, and municipalities now included within Districts, the number of clients and communities able to receive natural resource assistance is expanded. The role and importance of Districts in the scheme of things—land use planning, soil erosion and sediment control issues, farmland preservation issues, simple assistance to homeowners, education and outreach initiatives—will increase.

Keep in mind, however, that this legislation will not result in any increases in local property taxes. No new funds will be levied in order to support this expanded client base. SWCDs receive their support and funding through grant funds appropriated to the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

## NRCS Has Help for Wet Basements

NRCS just produced a brochure, "Drainage Around Your Home." The brochure targets homeowners who may be experiencing problems in their home due to flooding or wet basements. NRCS and SWCD Field Offices often receive visits from "non-farming clients" who need ideas or simple solutions to this very common problem.



State Conservationist Bill Gradle says their needs are real and we can help them solve their problems. "NRCS' experience with soil and water can provide some very simple ideas and techniques that any homeowner can apply to reduce wetness problems. With this brochure, they can take the information they need home with them and put it to work."

The information provided in the brochure is also available on the NRCS Homepage. In addition to providing information homeowners can use, the NRCS also provides valuable tips for individuals having new homes constructed. There are techniques that can be applied during construction that will help avoid flooding or wet basement problems before they start. Visit [www.il.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov) today!

## NRCS-IDNR Are Official Partners

NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle and Brent Manning, State Director for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), signed a Memorandum of Understanding on August 17, 1999 to solidify their partnership and ensure their commitment to joint projects and initiatives throughout the state. NRCS and IDNR have been partners in natural resource protection for years, but had never made any formal announcement.



## Monticello Students Fight for Drummer Soil

NRCS Soil Scientists met in September to discuss the progress of soil surveys, GIS technologies, and new soils initiatives. Illinois is still pursuing the idea of having a designated and official state soil declared by the Illinois General Assembly. For years now, this idea has been squelched. But NRCS and other members of the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association continue to work towards the adoption of Drummer Silty Loam as Illinois' State Soil.

At the September workshop, the soil scientists had a special visit by a group of Future Farmers of America (FFA) students from Monticello High School who have also been working to get Drummer named the state soil. The students have all testified in Springfield before the General Assembly, fighting for and beating the "drum" for Drummer. They are committed to see this through and are an excellent example of young people who show dedication and commitment to natural resources. The Monticello students will be joined by the support and enthusiasm of students from Chicago's High School for Agricultural Science. Hats off to these outstanding young people!

## Earth Express



Students in McLean and Livingston Counties will get an extra special science experience this year thanks to the efforts of the McLean and Livingston County Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The SWCDs worked together to develop a "Teaching Mobile" which will visit schools and 4-H clubs, sharing the values and merits of soil conservation. Called "EARTH EXPRESS," this ordinary trailer has been converted into a learning center where students learn about the importance of soil and the many ways people can make decisions and choices which



help to protect this vital resource. The primary lesson or theme for this year is "SOIL: The Treasure Beneath Your Feet."

The two District employees who brainstormed this project are Jackie Kraft, Resource Conservationist from McLean County SWCD and Debra Ruff, Resource Conservationist from Livingston County SWCD.

"Educating children about the importance of our natural resources is a priority for the Districts," says Kraft, "With this classroom on wheels, I think we can reach more students and leave a lasting impression on them."

"We've already got Earth Express 'booked' for most of the school year," adds Ruff. "That tells us that we're onto something teachers are looking for—new and fun ways to teach conservation. Earth Express will meet their needs and help us reach our goals as well."

## Aging Dams: A Problem We Can't Ignore

Sprinkled along the rivers and valleys of almost every state in the nation—including Illinois—are small flood control dams. These dams and flood control reservoirs are protecting communities all across the country. Many serve as "multi-purpose" structures, providing parks, ball fields, and other recreational facilities since they only fill up with water when the floodwaters come.

There are 10,400 such dams in the U.S. Many constructed years ago—some as much as 40 to 50 years ago. They have done well, protected many from floods that would have destroyed their homes, communities, and lives. These watershed structures provide public benefits worth about \$800 million every year. In Illinois there are 64 upstream flood control dams in 14 watersheds which protect communities and citizens on more than 645,000 acres of land. The problem is that these structures, built 40 or more years ago were designed and built with a 50 year lifespan. What that means is that these structures are in trouble. And so are the communities they've been faithfully protecting. By the year 2000, 1,200 of the nation's flood control structures will require significant restoration.

In Illinois there are 11 dams that are 40-44 years old and another 16 that are 30-39 years



old. Another 28 dams are 20-29 years old and will need attention within the next decade. The structures are aging as sediment weakens the structural soundness of the dams and threatens farmland and residential areas that have been built up over the years. Some sites will only require minimal repairs and maintenance to function properly. Others will need more intense attention, and in a few states, some dams may need to be entirely rebuilt.

"These structures have served our communities well for many years," says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "They have paid for themselves many times over in protection and peace of mind." Gradle encourages community leaders to take action needed to ensure the longevity of any flood control structures in their area. "It's a good investment for rural Illinois and urban Illinois. You don't wait to get health insurance until you're in intensive care," adds Gradle.

For more details, look up House Resolution 728, "Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments Act of 1999.

## Urban Manual



NRCS' Urban Manual continues to be a crucial document in controlling soil erosion and sediment in Congressional District 15. The NRCS Urban Manual, a manual that contains the standards and specifications for soil erosion and sediment control techniques used in urban environments, is continually updated and improved as a valuable conservation tool. NRCS formed a committee from various stakeholders in urban areas which provides input and feedback on ways to improve the manual and make it more valuable to local units of government and other consultants and engineers who use the manual as they establish conservation provisions and structures that control soil erosion and sediment movement from construction sites in communities. Updates were sent to more than 300 contacts this summer and during the holidays.

These updates are a service erosion control specialists need and want in Illinois. NRCS is meeting that need.

The Manual contains practices that help control water, reduce flooding, and control soil erosion and sediment movement on construction sites. A recent update on standards and the addition of new practices has been distributed to more than 300 interested parties. Demand for updates on this Manual indicates that erosion control in urban settings is a growing priority in Illinois.

## Buffer Strips

NRCS has a national initiative to have private landowners establish buffer strips on their farms, along creeks and streams, and fields. Buffer strips are a valuable part of any conservation system. They help reduce erosion, catch sediment before it enters watercourses, improve water quality, and provide habitat for many different species of wildlife.



To date, Illinois landowners have established 98,320 acres of buffers. The state goal has been set at 393,280 acres. Goals for the next few years are as follows:

2000	24,997 acres
2001	49,995 acres
2002	49,995 acres

Can we accomplish these goals? NRCS says "YES!" Buffers are a good economic and environmental investment for farmers. The cost-share and incentives for installing buffers is a popular option and NRCS feels reaching the goals is definitely possible. While Illinois' landowners have already indicated a great interest in buffers, there are still many farms in need of the protection buffers can provide. NRCS will continue to work with private landowners and work towards the 2000 goals.

## CREP Going Strong

Interest in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) continues to grow. Recently, the LaMoine River Watershed area was added to the list of eligible CREP areas, expanding a great opportunity for conservation and financial assistance to a number of landowners in the Illinois River watershed area.

Like the ever-popular CRP, CREP offers even better incentives for landowners willing to make longer or even permanent commitments of their marginal or floodplain cropland. CREP offers the usual FSA cost-share and rental payments, the usual NRCS technical assistance and planning help, but adds even more incentive payments from the state of Illinois.

"For areas that aren't highly productive or areas that are so close to the river that they flood frequently, CREP is the best bet out there," says NRCS' State Farm Bill Coordinator Paula Hingson. According to Hingson, CREP is only available in a few states, so she's glad Illinois is one of them. "It's been a great program and a great tool for getting conservation on some very crucial areas in the Illinois River watershed," adds Hingson.

## Kaskaskia Headwater Committee

A committee of local stakeholders has formed to address natural resource concerns in the Douglas and Champaign portions of the Kaskaskia River watershed.

The committee was formed in response to initial placement of the watershed on an IEPA list, which could lead to future regulation of watershed activities. The site was put on IEPA's list after sampling indicated contaminants upstream and downstream of a stream segment located within the watershed. This issue prompted Douglas and Champaign County SWCDs to apply for an IEPA grant to help study and address the problem. Grant monies would be used to increase awareness of water quality within the watershed and help identify voluntary strategies and solutions.

To date, concerns cover a range of issues:

- Too much silt and runoff
- Inadequate and disrepair of drainage tile
- Urban sprawl
- High nitrate concentration in water system
- Soil erosion & lack of wildlife habitat
- Definition of IEPA standards
- Lack of funds to properly manage resources



## Request from Clinton

The community of Clinton, IL (not President Bill Clinton) contacted the SWCD/NRCS office, asking for help in compiling inventory data to send to the state for their application to site a prison within the city limits. The local NRCS office provided assistance by producing site specific soil inventories for the four proposed sites. Inventory data showed which sites were well suited to building site development and which sites could experience future problems. Soil Surveys aren't just for farmers anymore!

## Douglas County Envirothon



Douglas County SWCD, working with the Moultrie County SWCD, conducted the area's first Envirothon--a competitive educational event for local high school students. Students are tested on soils, aquatics, forestry, and wildlife issues. Envirothon events are conducted in counties across the country. Finalists in each state compete nationally for prizes and scholarship monies. The Envirothon offers science teachers excellent tools and ideas for lesson plans, and the added excitement of competition seems to compel and enhance student involvement and enthusiasm.

## Three Agree on Kankakee River Assistance



Congressmen Weller and Ewing, and Senator Fitzgerald recently attended a meeting of the Kankakee River Basin Partnership where all three pledged to seek more federal assistance for restoration of the Kankakee River.

## Soil Survey Update News

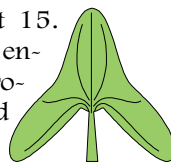


Updated soil survey data and resources are coming to District 15! The final product provides soil data needed for GIS systems and land use planning on CD rom. The CD includes all the data and software needed to select, view, and print out data. The final product for McLean County is due this year. Edgar County is due out in February 2000 and Champaign County should be completed this spring. Ford County is due in 2001 and Douglas County is due out in 2001.

For more information on the status of soil surveys in your congressional district, please feel free to email NRCS' State Soil Scientist at [BobMcLeese@il.usda.gov](mailto:BobMcLeese@il.usda.gov)

## WRP Signup Interest in District 15

Strong interest and success of the Wetland Reserve Program can be found in Congressional District 15. Champaign County has enrolled 139 acres in the program. Vermilion has enrolled 16 and Douglas County has entered 44 acres into easements that will help protect crops and communities from flooding.



"What's happening in Congressional District 15 is exactly what WRP is designed to do--restore large contiguous sections of floodplain areas to wetlands. In the process, we provide protection against flooding and create top quality habitat for wildlife," says Bill Gradle, NRCS State Conservationist.

WRP is a win-win situation as long as federal funding and other state partners are adequate to meet the needs of clients. In many areas of the state, applicants wishing to enroll acreage are waiting to see if NRCS will receive sufficient funds to purchase the easements and begin the restoration work.

## NRCS Directory

for Congressional District 15

State Conservationist--	William Gradle (217) 353-6601
Asst. State Conservationist-- Mngt. Support & Planning	Tony Kramer (217) 353-6602
Asst. State Conservationist-- Resource Assessment & Tech.	James Tillman (217) 353-6003
Asst. State Conservationist-- Field Operation District # 3	Theresa Chadwick (815) 937-3268
Asst. State Conservationist-- Field Operation District #2	Steve Mozley (217) 492-5045
Asst. State Conservationist-- Community Assistance	Lue A. Walters (309) 452-2492
District Conservationist-- Champaign & Ford Counties	Leon Wendte (217) 388-5201
District Conservationist-- DeWitt & Piatt Counties	Scott Wallace (217) - 935-6504
District Conservationist-- Douglas County	Ben Mingo (217) 253-2022
District Conservationist-- Edgar County	Ray Coombes (217) 465-5325
District Conservationist-- Kankakee County	Bob Gotkowski (815) 937-3233
District Conservationist-- Livingston County	Mark Baran (815) 844-6127
District Conservationist-- McLean County	Kent Bohnhoff (309) 452-0830
District Conservationist-- Vermilion County	Tom Benjamin (217) 442-8610